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ABSTRACT

Three characteristics of school writing activities that may make it difficult for students to learn to write with skill and enthusiasm are identified in this paper. They are: the solitary nature of most writing tasks, a lopsided emphasis on low-level details of text such as grammar and spelling, and the isolation of writing from reading in the classroom. The paper describes a set of educational devices that attempt to change these aspects of writing instruction: the Story Maker, based on the notion of story trees with which children compose stories by making choices among story segments; and the Pre-Fab Story Maker and the Story Maker Maker, which allow children more creative input into the story-making process. These three tools are described both as suggestions to teachers for innovative classroom language activities and as concrete examples of the implications of the theoretical framework developed in the paper. Reaction to the Story Maker from a teacher's perspective and the author's response to that reaction are included. (Author/FL)

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Reading Education Report No. 14

MAKING STORIES, MAKING SENSE*

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Abstract

Although we can describe and aspire to an ideal classroom writing situation, teachers often feel frustrated in their attempts to achieve these goals. This paper identifies three characteristics of school writing activities which may make it more difficult for students to learn to write with skill and enthusiasm: the solitary nature of most writing tasks, a lopsided emphasis on low level details of text such as grammar and spelling, and the isolation of writing from reading in the classroom. It then describes a set of educational devices which attempt to change these aspects of writing instruction. The basic tool is called the Story Maker and is based on the notion of story trees with which children compose stories by making choices among story segments. The other two devices, the Pre-Fab Story Maker and the Story Maker Maker, allow children more creative input into the story-making process. These three tools are described both as suggestions to teachers for innovative classroom language activities and as concrete examples of the implications of the theoretical framework developed in the paper.

Making Stories, Making Sense

Here is a common vision of the ideal classroom writing situation: children, enthusiastic about their developing compositions, crafting suspenseful stories and elegant expositions, discussing their work with one another or collaborating on a common product, correcting their mechanics at the end of the composing process after the main themes have solidified, writing to create an effect in an audience -- in short, using written language to communicate. As usual, the reality frequently falls woefully short of the dream. Faced with a group of children who write on widely varying levels, pressured by the educational bureaucracy to make sure they all know how to use quotation marks and armed with little if any specific preparation or materials for writing instruction, teachers often feel that the dream is an impossible one.

Obviously, not every writing experience in school is uniformly dreary. Many teachers have discovered creative ways to engage students, both individually and in groups, in writing tasks. Innovative programs that have been documented include Kenneth Koch's successes in inspiring elementary school children to write poetry (Koch 1970); the language experience approach explored by Allen (1976), Ashton-Warner (1963), Hall (1970), and Stauffer (1970); and Moffett's (1976) student-centered

curriculum. By and large, though, the educational, administrative, and social context within which elementary school teachers teach writing tends to lead to three characteristics of school writing activities which may actually block a student's ability to write, rather than facilitating its growth. The first of these is the solitary nature of most writing tasks. Children usually write in silence at their seats, rarely interacting with one another or the teacher. Writing, of all subjects taught to elementary school children, most effectively isolates individual students. Group games, such as spelling bees, arithmetic baseball, or even flashcard practice which facilitate interaction among children in reading and math classes, are not as common in writing class. Reading is taught, at least some of the time, in groups which provide an opportunity for children to communicate with one another. Arithmetic problems are sometimes discussed by the class as a whole, and other subjects such as art and science lend themselves naturally to joint projects; but in the realm of writing, collective assignments are less common and class discussions of either the process or product of writing are rare.

The scarcity of class discussions on <u>how</u> to write is an indication of the second problem school writing instruction often exhibits: a lopsided emphasis on the lowest-level details of texts, such as grammar and spelling. Some of this imbalance can be traced to a general lack of research on comprehensive models

of the writing process. Until recently, the research community has regarded writing either as an unanalyzable mystical process without separable components or as a task whose only teachable aspects are handwriting, spelling, and syntax. Thus, much of the writing instruction in language arts textbooks focuses on these more palpable aspects of writing. Graves (1977) notes that almost three-quarters of the writing-related activities in a sample of grade five language arts texts are devoted to mechanics. Recently, however, research on both the writing process and the structure of its products has been moving toward a formal examination of more global textual properties -- properties such as the role of setting and characters' reactions to story events (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975; Stein & Glenn, 1977), the interplay of characters' plans and counterplans (Bruce & Newman, 1978), and the function of rhetorical features (Booth, 1961). Despite a few attempts to integrate this theory with classroom methods (Bruce, Collins, Rubin, & Gentner, in press; Clay, 1975; Collins & Gentner, in press; Graves, 1975; Scardamalia, in press), few of these emerging perspectives have yet found their way into education courses or standard textbooks.

The third troublesome aspect of writing activities is one which actually concerns the entire language arts curriculum: the isolation of writing from reading in the classroom. If reading

and writing are viewed -- as they should be -- as the two necessary components of written communication, then it is clear that they are intimately and inevitably connected and that writing activities should produce texts which are meant to be read and to communicate. In school, however, children infrequently read what other students in the class have written (or what they themselves have written, for that matter), or write with the expectation that their composition will be read by anyone but the teacher. They rarely learn to identify an audience and consider its knowledge and attitudes when they write. In fact, one of the few connections between reading and writing in school is an assignment to write a theme about a book or story.

Reversing Trends in the Teaching of Writing

Although they may be hard to avoid in current school settings, none of these characteristics of writing lessons is inevitable. Educational methods or devices which reverse any of the three trends described above have the potential to significantly affect the teaching of writing. Specifically, these three "reverse trends" would be: taking advantage of the potential power of the social situation in the classroom, focusing on higher-level structures in text, and re-integrating reading and writing in school. In the remainder of this paper, I will describe a set of teaching tools which embody this theoretical analysis and discuss their implications for the

classroom. These methods appear quite promising, but they are largely untested; I describe them here both to explicate further the theoretical framework and to encourage the development of other realizations of this framework in teaching practice.

The three separate but closely related tools to be described here form a sequence in which the child contributes in increasing amounts to the process of producing a story. The first, called the Story Maker, is a piece of cardboard on which is written a large number of story segments. Children produce stories using the Story Maker by making a series of choices among the alternative story parts. The second, the Pre-Fab Story Maker, is a device with which children can put together their own Story Maker out of already-written pieces of stories. Finally, the Story Maker Maker helps children construct a Story Maker virtually from scratch, writing the possible stories on their own.

All three of these are best described in terms of a metaphorical sense of "tree" that is commonly used in science. This kind of tree is most frequently used for family trees, for diagrams of sentences in linguistics, and to represent the structure of the plant and animal kingdoms as illustrated in Figure 1. (The tree in the figure is meant strictly as an example and does not faithfully represent the structure of the vertebrate animals.) Notice that it has its root at the top and

that the branches extend downward. It is composed of a collection of boxes which I will call nodes connected by lines which I will call branches. Each node, except for those at the very bottom, is connected to several lower-level nodes by a set of branches. In Figure 1, for example, REPTILES is connected to TURTLES, LIZARDS, and ALLIGATORS. Left and right used in reference to the tree mean these directions from the reader's point of view. Thus, the leftmost branch which comes out of (extends downward from) node AMPHIBIANS is FROGS. A path through such a tree starts at the top node, goes next to a node which is connected to it by a branch, and continues in this way through connected nodes until it reaches the bottom of the tree. The rightmost path through this tree consists of the nodes VERTEBRATES, MAMMALS, LIVE-BEARING MAMMALS, PLACENTAL, CARNIVORES, and DOGS.

The Basic Story Maker

Using these terms, it is quite simple to describe the Story Maker; it presents children with a tree in which each node contains a story segment. Each path through the tree is a complete story. Children construct their stories by choosing a branch to follow at each node, eventually ending up with a complete path which starts at the top of the tree and continues to the bottom. Figure 2 shows the beginning of a story tree about a missing bicycle. Each story that could be constructed

using this tree would start with the story segment in the top node; each of the nodes connected to this top node represents a different direction for the story to proceed. Based on personal preference, or, as I describe in more detail below, other story quality goals, the child chooses one of these three possibilities. The next set of choices, then, are those which are connected to the chosen segment; if a child had chosen the leftmost option in Figure 2, for example, she would next have to choose among the two bottom segments in Figure 3.

Notice that each choice the child makes determines the next set of choices; different choices at any point lead to totally different sets of nodes to choose from next. This characteristic is an important difference between the Story Maker and Mad Libs (a game in which blanks in a story are filled according to designated parts of speech). In Mad Libs, each choice is essentially independent of the others; the word chosen to fill any particular blank has no effect on the allowable fillers for other blanks. The interdependence of choices in Story Maker is revealed progressively to children as they make their way through the construction of a story. At any one time, children see only the current set of options. Thus, the consequences of their choices sometimes come as a surprise when the next set of story segments is revealed.

The fact that in Story Maker a child's early choices have important consequences for the rest of the story means that this device can be used to teach notions about the structure and coherence of stories. In fact, a child is encouraged by Story Maker to focus on these higher-level characteristics of the story since details of spelling, writing, and syntax are handled by the device. Every story that can be produced with Story Maker will be correct along these dimensions.

Our prototype Story Maker is made of large pieces of oaktag on which the individual story segments are written and covered with pieces of colored construction paper. The branches of the tree are explicitly indicated by lines drawn between the segments. To produce a story, a child reads all the choices at a given point by opening the paper doors, chooses one segment with which to continue the story, indicates that choice by closing the other doors, then goes on to read the next set of choices. After the child repeats this process several times, the words showing through the open doors constitute a complete story which the child can copy, illustrate, and compare with other children's stories.

This most basic Story Maker activity demonstrates an initial method of reuniting reading and writing -- while the child is producing a story, he or she is also reading its components. Often a child will read the story aloud from beginning to end each time he or she chooses the next segment. In the same way

that reading any story can stretch a child's language skills, reading a Story Maker story in the process of constructing it can introduce the the child to new words, sentence structures, and plot possibilities that wouldn't have been encountered in writing a story by him/herself. Yet because the child has participated in the creation of the story by choosing directions for it to proceed, this Story Maker exercise functions as a writing activity as well.

The Story Maker in the Classroom

In one of my research group's first experiences with the Story Maker, we discovered that it also has the potential to turn this writing/reading experience into a public event, thus materially affecting the social context of the classroom. We took the Story maker into an open classroom of children in grades K through 2 in a local private school. The teacher chose two girls in second grade who could read fairly well to work with it. Together they chose a story, agreeing on most of the choices and arguing about a few. When they had finished, the wanted to show off their story, so they invited the teacher to listen to them read the story aloud in unison. By this time, all the activity had attracted some of the other students, many of whom could not yet read at all. They watched, fascinated, as the two girls read their story again and again, pointing to the story segments as they went along. The younger children had the opportunity to observe an exciting reading and writing activity as well as

having a short story read to them several times in a row with its words clearly visible.

After a while, the two girls decided to construct another story; this time, the younger children tentatively offered suggestions about who the invaders might be (they were working on a science fiction story) and how they might be dealt with. Had the session continued longer, these children could have been even more actively involved in writing a story without an adult's help -- even though they couldn't read. None of this would have happened had the two girls read or written stories alone at their seats.

In order to heighten children's focus on high-level story characteristics such as plot, suspense, conflict, and surprise, we have added another aspect to the basic Story Maker task by asking children to produce stories that fulfill a goal or match a description. With the simplest story trees, we have them write funny, boring, long, or short stories. In a more complex case, such as that illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, the instruction might be something like: "Write a story in which Susie and her best friend have a fight." Confronted with this goal and the choices illustrated in Figure 2, a child would be more likely to succeed if he or she chose the rightmost branch (which mentions Susie's best friend) than if he or she chose the middle branch (which brings in Susie's parents and implies Susie will have a smaller role). We encourage children to discuss the reasons for

their choices, for involving two or more children in the production of a story provides a context in which it is easy for them to talk about the contribution off each choice to the overall story.

A wide range of story characteristics can be explored in this way by using a collection of story trees. Individual paths through a tree may illustrate stories told from different characters' points of view, with differing amounts of suspense, with varying temporal sequences, with different morals, or with conflicts between varying sets of characters. The Story Maker helps a child shift the focus of his or her writing activity away from lower-level details such as spelling, grammar, and basic sentence structure by guaranteeing that every story will pass a teacher's scrutiny on these dimensions. Each story may or may not successfully fulfill a previously set goal of a "story in which Jill tricks her brother"--but this is the problem the child must solve, rather than the problem of forming words and letters correctly.

In effecting this shift in focus, the Story Maker paradoxically both speeds up and slows down communication processes in appropriate ways. By handling the low-level details, it speeds up the composition process so that children do not get lost worrying about punctuation. At the same time, it slows down the process of reading a story, requiring a child to

pause and, being aware that the story could go on in various ways, select a direction for it to proceed; in short, it forces children to focus consciously on alternative meanings in the middle of a story.

Before introducing additional devices related to the Story Maker, I want to mention a few variations on the basic idea I have described so far. One related device, which was developed independently by Edward Packard (1976, 1978), and which is currently commercially available, is a set of books that a child reads by making choices about the way the story will proceed at intermediate points. These books include instructions to turn to different pages according to answers to choices about the story, e.g., "If you decide to walk down the beach, turn to page 5. If you decide to climb the mountain, turn to page 7." These books differ from the Story maker primarily in that they are not designed to illustrate any particular structural aspects of stories, so the individual stories do not differ systematically and, in fact, may even contain some of the same episodes. Even so, these books provide good starting points for some Story Maker activities.

More closely related is a Story Maker we have implemented on a small desk-top computer. The computer displays the set of options at each point, accumulates the story as the child makes choices, and prints it on a small printer at the conclusion of

the process. Children are fascinated by the computer, and in particular, by the sudden appearance on the screen of each set of options for the story. The major difference between this version and the cardboard version is that, while the structure of the tree is explicitly indicated on the cardboard, the child must infer it from the computer. Discovering and explicating the structure of the tree can be an added dimension in a child's use of the Story Maker.

The Pre-Fab Story Maker

The next step in the sequence is the Pre-Fab Story Maker, with which children create their own story trees from already-constructed nodes and branches. Children are provided with story segments on index cards and are asked to fit them into a pre-drawn tree structure so that all the paths through the tree make sense. The skeleton tree may be drawn on a piece of cardboard with slits at the nodes into which the index cards fit, or it may be made from a pegboard using pegboard hooks as nodes on which hang the cards and yarn as branches which connect the hooks. This second method has the advantage of being more flexible, since the hook-and-yarn configuration can be changed from one time to the next, and as they become familiar with the process of building a story tree, children can also be asked to place the yarn branches correctly along with the cards.

Completing a Pre-Fab Story Maker requires the child to make decisions about the sequence of events in a story, to follow causal sequences, and, perhaps, to understand how devices such as flashbacks affect the order of presentation of story parts. Coordinating different story lines which share a common beginning can help children focus on the points in stories where various possibilities diverge. When several children work together on such a device, this writing project easily becomes a social activity. Assembling a Story Maker provides an opportunity for a child to elicit feedback from other children in the classroom who produce stories using it.

A large number of related activities follow from the Pre-Fab Story Maker idea. For example, students can be presented with a story tree containing several blank nodes and asked to make up segments which would coherently fill the blanks. Constructing a segment which fits into two diverging stories in the tree can be a particularly challenging task. Children may also experiment with switching the placement of two individual segments in a tree, making judgments as to whether or not the resulting stories are coherent.

The Story Maker Maker

The third tool, the Story Maker Maker, requires the most creative input from children, yet is the easiest for teachers to construct. A Story Maker Maker is simply a bare tree structure

made from cardboard or pegboard in which the branches are provided but the nodes are blank. Using this device, students make up their own Story Makers from beginning to end by writing story segments and placing them in the tree. In our experience so far, this has worked best if students working in teams are encouraged to brainstorm about their chosen topic and write down individual ideas (which do not have to fit into a single story!) on index cards. After they have collected several story segments, they begin to fill in the structure (again, it is easiest if the tree has been pre-drawn) and generate more ideas to fill in the holes still left in the tree. Another method for generating such a Story Maker would be to start with an entire story and create a branching structure by asking at several points along the way: "What else could have happened here?" More sophisticated children can also provide the story goals to go along with the Story Maker.

Story Maker Maker activities address all three of the theoretical perspectives described above. First, they forge an important link between writing and reading by introducing the idea of audience. Other children in the class provide a natural audience for a child constructing a Story Maker (and accompanying goals) since they will use it to produce stories. Their feedback can be quite focused as they evaluate the alternatives at each point in terms of the goals they are trying to satisfy or in

terms of the coherence of the story. In our first attempt to use the Story Maker Maker, one 10-year-old boy created a story tree about a baseball game. Because he had some trouble coordinating several story lines at once, some of his stories were less coherent than others. When he finished, we invited a friend of his to produce some stories from the baseball Story Maker. The friend, however, didn't like some of the stories and even commented about one, "That's not a story!" The discussion that ensued was unusual in that two students, without a teacher directing the conversation, were commenting to one another on story structure and coherence. During that conversation, the first boy modified several story segments in his tree, resulting in a markedly improved Story Maker.

Such conversations about story qualities illustrate one way the Story Maker Maker addresses the second perspective -- the importance of an increased focus on higher-level textual considerations such as specification of characters' plans, coherence of cause-and-effect chains, and introduction of humor or surprise. The Story Maker Maker is different from the other two devices described here because, in providing the child more opportunity for input into the story, it reintroduces the levels of syntax, vocabulary, and spelling as potential problems for him or her. But by dividing the writing process into two steps--crafting individual sentences and fitting them together into a

coherent tree -- the Story Maker Maker enables a child to manipulate story segments in which he or she has already worked out some of the lower-level problems and to concentrate instead on their juxtaposition in a story. Editing is facilitated as well since changing a sentence means replacing an index card--not recopying an entire page. In this manner, a complete rearrangement of a story can be accomplished easily. Although it is not a component of writing stories in general, the need to create alternative continuations for stories makes children aware of the differences among those options--differences which exist on dimensions other than spelling, handwriting, and syntax. And if they decide to create, or example, a "funny" set of stories and a "scary" set of stories in the same tree, they must begin to appreciate the story characteristics which differentiate between these possibilities.

Finally, the Story Maker Maker not only makes possible group writing experiences, it almost demands them. Our earliest experience, described above, showed us that a child working alone may not be that successful in building a story tree. Later attempts in which children worked in pairs produced more coherent, creative trees. A final anecdote illustrates both this positive influence of the social situation and the kinds of editing operations the children performed which hinted at their growing conception of the structure of stories.

Two 10-year-old boys constructed a tree about a character they called Grouchy the Slog Monster. The beginning of their story tree is shown in Figure 4. They first generated ideas about Grouchy's genesis and how he could or could not be killed by various groups; when one boy couldn't think of anything to add the other took over, enabling a greater richness and density of ideas than if they had worked separately. When they began to put their story segments into the tree, some interesting revisions took place. The sentence "Charlie's Angels have guns that can't kill Grouchy," was replaced by "Charlie's Angels tried to kill him with their guns, but it didn't work and Grouchy was still alive," indicating more of a narrative style. When most of the tree was filled in, the boys discovered that one path through the structure created a story in which a sentence about the Army's attempts to kill Grouchy was followed by a sentence relating some scientists' decision to put Grouchy in the Museum of Science. Realizing this story line was incoherent, they discarded the Museum of Science card and continued with the Army theme. Once again, they had been able to focus on issues of story sense and had, through their interaction, motivated themselves to improve their product.

Summary

This brief description does not exhaust all possible Story Maker activities. The basic notion of story trees suggests many

other variations. For example, children might be asked to construct from a Story Maker the story which they think a particular friend, relative, or teacher would choose. Teachers and children can create story trees in which stories diverge along different dimensions, such as the degree of conflict. More experience with the Story Maker in classrooms is needed to explore its relationship to other language arts activities, to develop guidelines for choosing appropriate activities for specific children, to work out methods for creating story trees, and to consider sequences which gradually lead children through more advanced writing challenges.[1]

In addition to its significance as a specific educational device, however, the Story Maker sequence also exists as an embodiment of three important elements of an approach to teaching writing. First, it demonstrates ways to reunite reading and writing by providing experiences which include aspects of both and by making concrete the idea of audience which links the production and reception of communication. Second, it helps both children and teachers avoid the pitfall of focusing primarily on

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[1]If you are interested in trying out any of the ideas in this article and would like a few sample story trees with which to start out, write to the Center for the Study of Reading, c/o Bolt Beranek and Newman, 50 Moulton Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138. In return we would appreciate comments and anecdotes about your experiences with them.

aspects of text such as syntax, spelling, and grammar by removing them temporarily from the children's control, thus freeing up their attention to concentrate on the way characters interact, the coherence of the story, and such devices as surprise and humor. Finally, it breaks the isolation of writing by creating a social and cognitive context in which group writing efforts and discussions happen naturally. Investigating other educational methods which share these theoretical underpinnings should be a valuable future research direction with the potential to affect classroom language experiences.

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Reactions to the Story Maker: A Teacher's Perspective

Taffy Raphael

Jill Lažansky

Teachers have been inundated over the years with cookbooks of ideas for engaging children in creative writing. One common suggestion is "writing centers" which can resemble anything from travel agencies to artists' studios, military forts to desert islands. To inspire children to write creatively, these centers are then filled with "novel" incentives. "Story starters" are another example of an activity commonly cited in creative writing manuals, as are picture cards with lists of "special words" for use in the to-be-created story. The underlying assumption of suggestions such as the above would appear to be that children benefit from reflecting on their own about a specific theme. Given that this is allowed to occur, they will then produce cohesive stories. Unfortunately, these tend to be written for rather contrived purposes and for unspecified audiences of readers and/or listeners.

The concept of a Story Maker and its derivatives would appear to take issue with such an assumption, for basic to the design of the story-makers is the notion of interaction, both at a text level (between author and reader), and at a conversational level (among students). The Story Maker concept reflects an effort to place writing in a context of communicative exchange.

In so doing, it (a) shifts instructional emphasis away from mechanics and toward consideration of author's purpose, cohesion of story ideas, and awareness of audience; (b) encourages children to explore the notion of interpretation from both a writer's and a reader's perspective; (c) allows children to respond critically to text at all stages of production; and (d) emphasizes the relationship between an author and his/her readers.

Practically speaking, the Story Maker concept is appealing for a variety of reasons. It provides a means for engaging students, who range in ability from the non-writer/poor reader to the experienced writer/reader, in purposeful writing activity. The non-writer/poor reader working with a well-constructed Story Maker has, as Rubin's article indicates, the capability of producing several stories. The reading this entails could be nothing but beneficial. Another positive point is the fact that grammar, spelling, and punctuation (long the bane of the low ability writer) are no longer issues. The student with a firmer handle on writing and reading skills who still is not ready for that "big leap" to story construction from scratch will find the Pre-Fab Story Maker a challenge, as s/he explores how organization can affect the clarity and cohesiveness of a message. The competent writer, capable of participating in text production at all stages of development, can develop his or her

skills further by creating a Story Maker Maker. The fact that there is both a purpose to the activity and a specified audience makes this activity particularly appropriate.

Classroom implementation of the Story Maker becomes increasingly appealing when one considers the fact that it requires but minimal financial investment. Granted, the computer phase of the Story Maker may not be available in the average classroom. However, most classroom teachers can access the index cards, yarn, pegboard, cardboard, and magic markers necessary for construction of the various Story Makers. In fact, the visual display which the teacher-made Story Maker model provides would be lost if one were to use only the computer.

In discussing effective implementation of Rubin's notion of a Story Maker, we will first address the constraints its design would seem to suggest. The constraints fall into two categories: one can be loosely described as "conceptual pitfalls," the other as "implementation concerns." The first is a function of the design of the Story Maker and the Pre-Fab Story Maker. While training young writers to manipulate text for their own purposes is basic to any writing program, the basic Story Maker may be somewhat limiting, since it is <u>prepared</u> text which students manipulate. That is, as the child progresses through the activity, his choices not only become progressively narrowed, but are also clearly delineated. Because of this, we feel that

his or her perceptions of what is involved in a creative writing task could become unrealistic. To emphasize a point made by Rubin, this should suggest to teachers that, as a means of creative expression, the basic Story Maker cannot serve as the students' only creative writing experience, but rather, as a valuable supplement to the current creative writing program.

The second area of concern is with practical implementation of the three types of Story Makers in the classroom. Specific examples of the problems might include: (a) use of the Story Maker requires an environment where students may interact without being considered a disturbance; (b) preparation of the Story Maker could require considerable investment of the teacher's time; (c) the reduction of the direct role of the teacher, if misinterpreted, could result in a lack of teacher-student interaction; and (d) implementation of the Story Maker as an instructional device should grow out of an examination of student needs and interests. In terms of the above, we seem to be emphasizing that Story Makers are tools. As such, it is the responsibility of the teacher to use them effectively, to create environments which will capitalize on the strengths of each tool and which will minimize their weaknesses. The Story Maker, Pre-Fab Story Maker, and the Story Maker Maker must be used selectively and with those students for whom the tools were intended.

In conclusion, we applaud the creators of the Story Maker concept for an attempt to take concepts founded in basic research and apply them to classroom practice. The cautions we suggest in the use of the Story Maker do nothing to detract from the appeal of the concept. Used properly, the activities show promise for helping young writers exercise and develop their skills.

Author's Response

It is truly a pleasure to receive comments on this report from people who have spent years teaching in classrooms, since these ideas were developed with the classroom in mind, but without the benefit of a great deal of personal teaching experience. It is exactly this kind of cooperation between researchers and practitioners which we hope will lead to useful educational innovations based on well-thought-out theoretical perspectives.

I want to respond just briefly to the two categories of constraints identified in the reaction. Raphael and LaZansky first discuss "conceptual pitfalls" of the Story Maker, focusing primarily on the fact that students in general manipulate prepared text in using the three devices. While this is true of the specific Story Maker and Pre-Fab Story Maker activities listed in the report, it is important for teachers using the Story Maker to regard it as a framework and take-off point for the creation of other similar activities. The pegboard version of the Story Maker, in particular, lends itself easily to other language activities in which children have more individual creative input. For example, children can be asked to fill in empty holes in a story tree with their own story segments or to write sets of options from which other children may choose the

most appropriate one to fill an empty node. To echo and amplify another point made by the respondents, Story Maker activities were never meant to be the sole source of creative writing in a classroom. In fact, we have seen in some of our pilot experiences that, after working with these devices for a while, children often spontaneously start writing stories on their own. One 7-year-old girl worked with some Story Maker stories about a Haunted House for an hour, then went home and put them together into an illustrated book which included a story and a song of her own.

The second area Raphael and LaZansky identify concerns the practical implementation of the Story Maker devices. One of their points is that using the Story Maker requires an environment where students may interact without disturbing the remainder of the class. The pegboard version of the Story Maker can itself be used to create such an environment. If it is set up facing a corner, the pegboard acts as a room divider, effectively creating a small space in which some children can use the Story Maker without distracting the others. A second concern was that preparation of the Story Maker might involve a large investment of the teacher's time. This is probably not so much a worry about the physical construction of the pegboard or cardboard versions, as they can be set up in an hour or two, but about the writing of the story materials. This is certainly an

area which needs more work, but I have a few preliminary suggestions. First, we have a few Story Maker stories which we can send to people interested in experimenting with them. Second, children themselves are excellent sources of story trees; one of our most successful ones was written by two third graders under the supervision of a tutor. Third, we hope to develop and disseminate methods by which already-written stories can easily be adapted to story trees. Finally, our hope is that eventually people who make up story trees will share them with one another. To this end, I would appreciate receiving a copy of any story trees anyone creates, and I will keep a file of them for future dissemination.

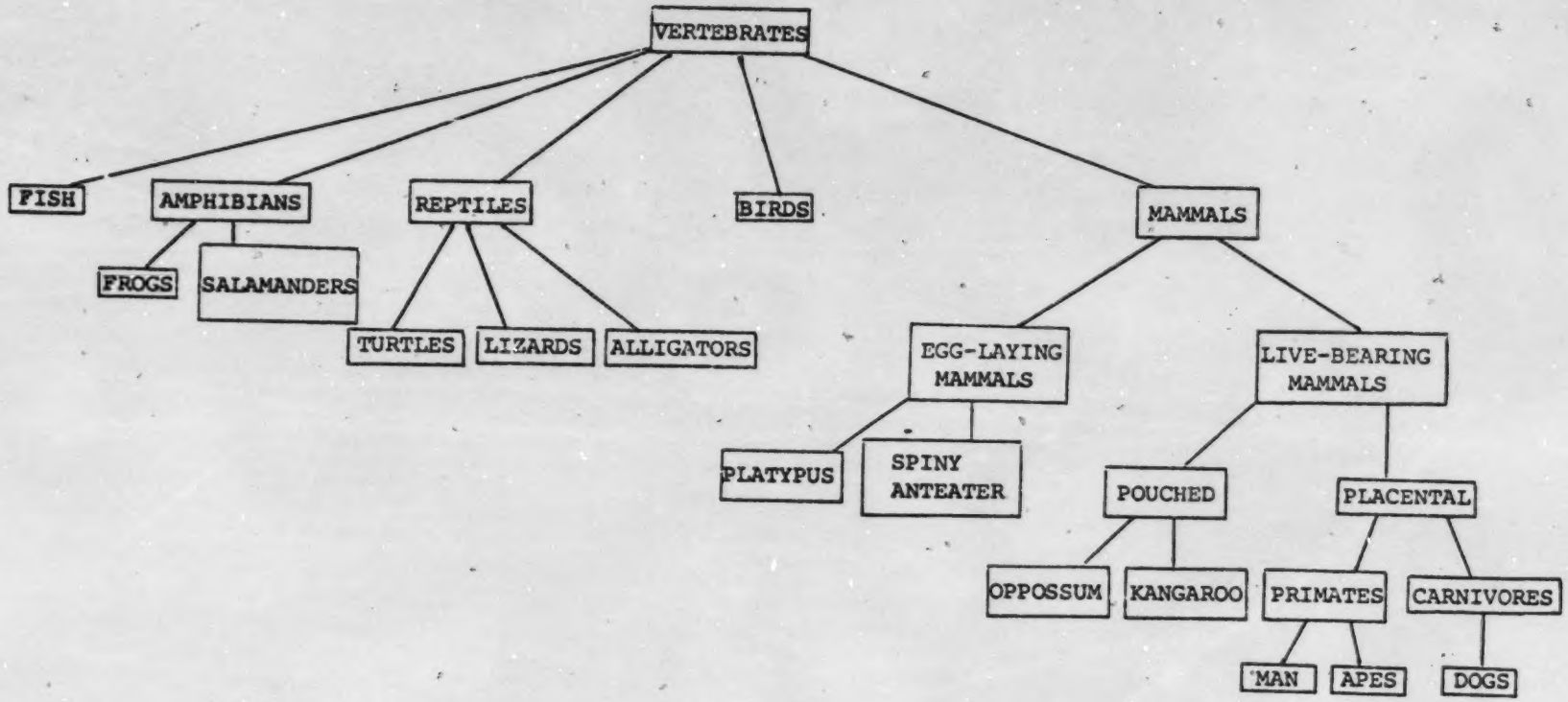
Figure Captions

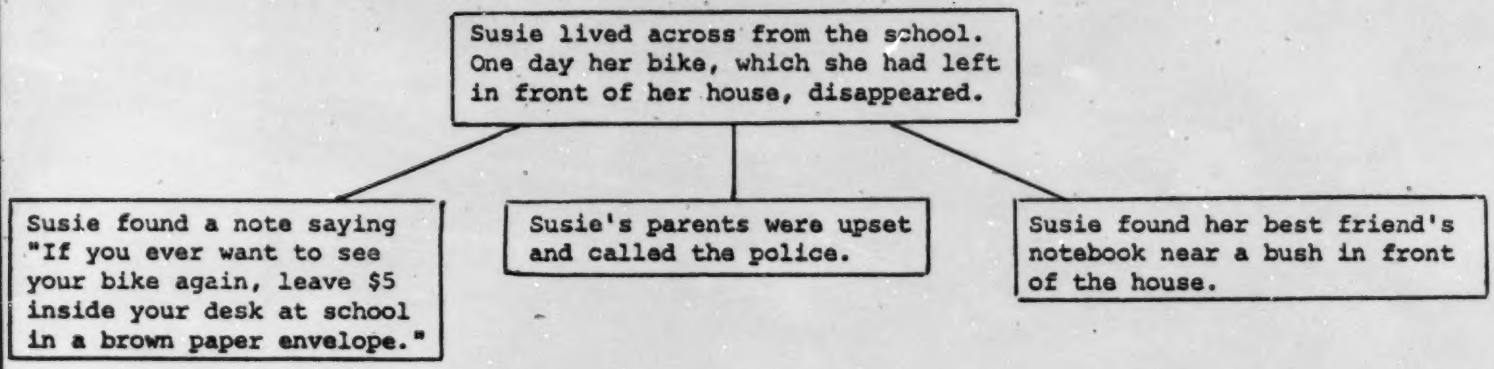
Figure 1. A biological tree.

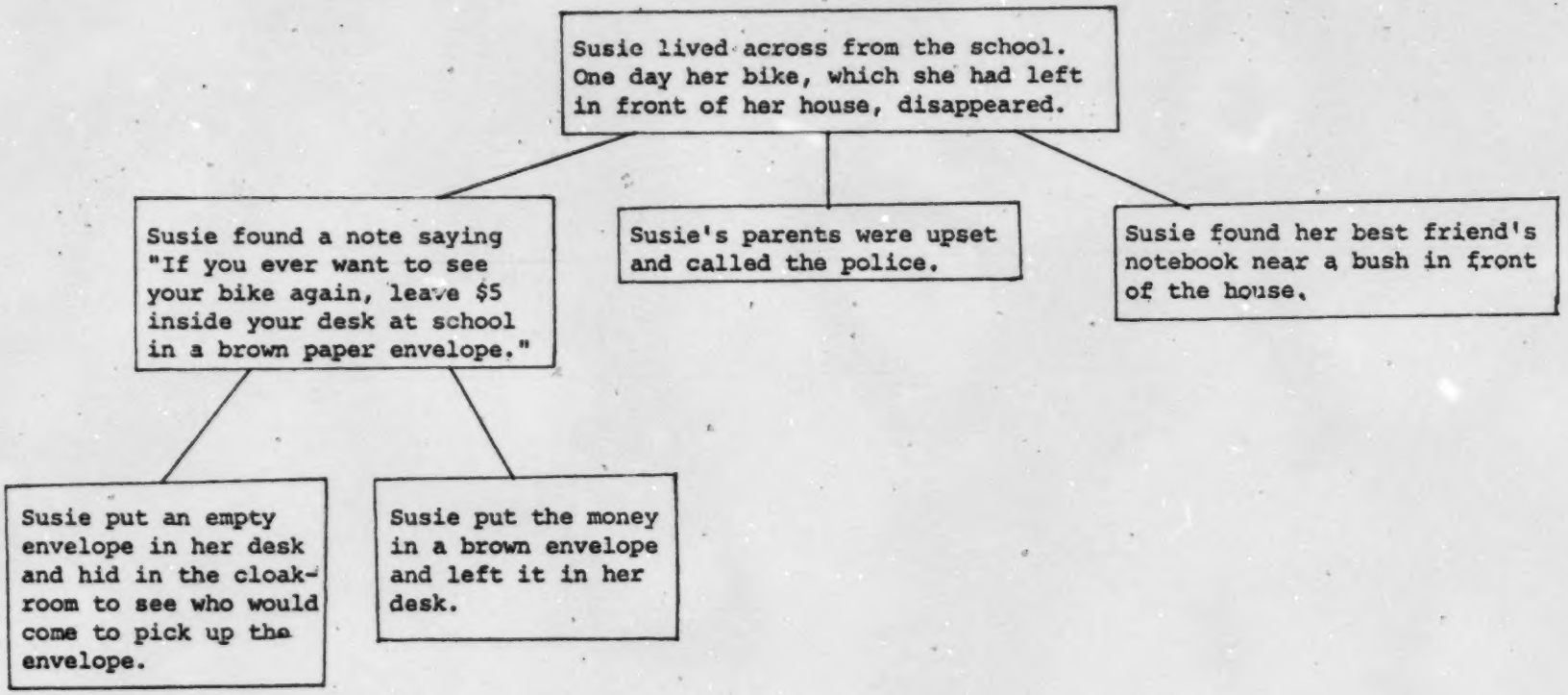
Figure 2. The beginning of a mystery story tree.

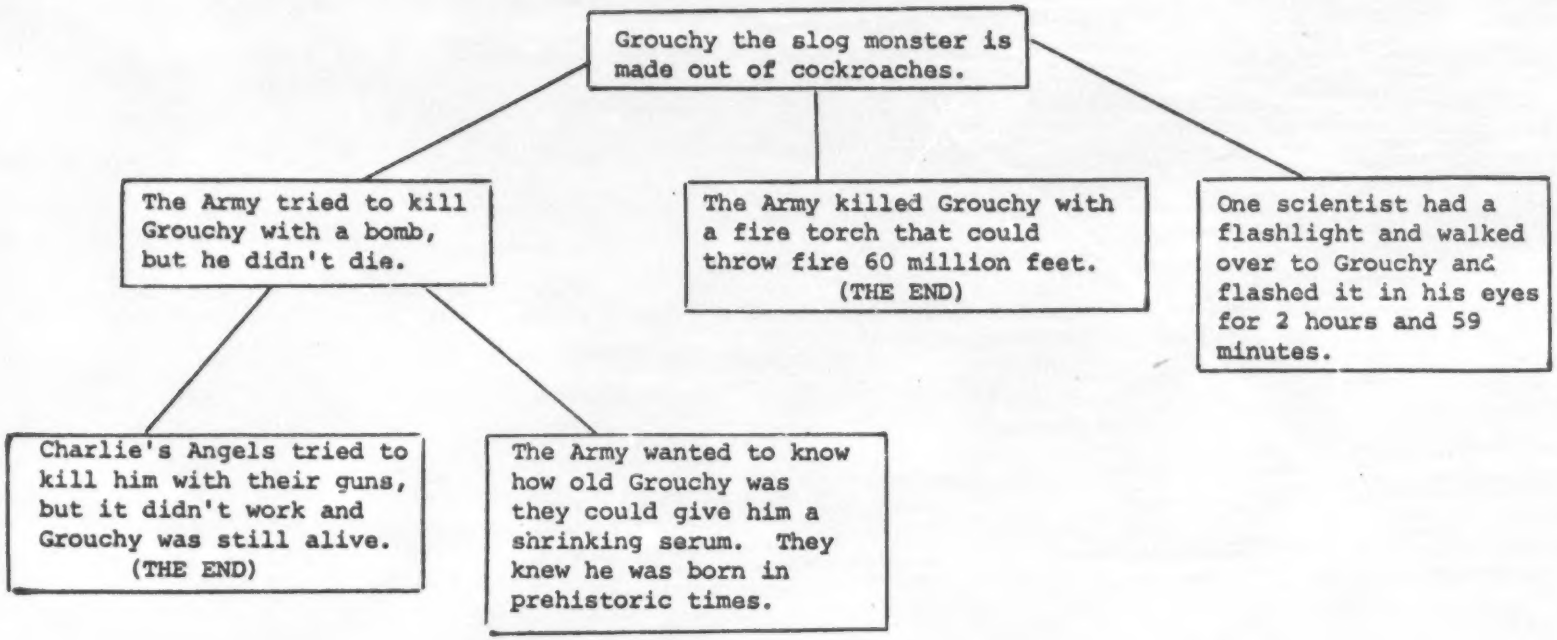
Figure 3. The next set of choices in the mystery story.

Figure 4. The beginning of a story tree written by two fourth graders.


VERTEBRATES
FISH
AMPHIBIANS
REPTILES
BIRDS
MAMMALS
FROGS
SALAMANDERS
TURTLES
LIZARDS
ALLIGATORS
EGG-LAYING MAMMALS
LIVE-BEARING MAMMALS
PLATYPUS
SPINY ANTEATER
POUCHED
PLACENTAL
OPPOSSUM
KANGAROO
PRIMATES
CARNIVORES
MAN
APES
DOGS


Susie lived across from the school. One day her bike, which she had left in front of her house, disappeared.
Susie found a note saying "If you ever want to see your bike again, leave $5 inside your desk at school in a brown paper envelope."
Susie's parents were upset and called the police.
Susie found her best friend's notebook near a bush in front of the house.


Susie lived across from the school. One day her bike, which she had left in front of her house, disappeared.
Susie found a note saying "If you ever want to see your bike again, leave $5 inside your desk at school in a brown paper envelope."
Susie's parents were upset and called the police.
Susie found her best friend's notebook near a bush in front of the house.
Susie put an empty envelope in her desk and hid in the cloak-room to see who would come to pick up the envelope.
Susie put the money in a brown envelope and left it in her desk.


Grouchy the slog monster is made out of cockroaches.
The Army tried to kill Grouchy with a bomb, but he didn't die.
The Army killed Grouchy with a fire torch that could throw fire 60 million feet. (THE END)
One scientist had a flashlight and walked over to Grouchy and flashed it in his eyes for 2 hours and 59 minutes.
Charlie's Angels tried to kill him with their guns, but it didn't work and Grouchy was still alive. (THE END)
The Army wanted to know how old Grouchy was they could give him a shrinking serum. They knew he was born in prehistoric times.

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